



2021 HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS MEETING – STATEMENT

Since the international community last convened to discuss the global refugee response in 2019, refugees have suffered. The pandemic disproportionately impacted the world's 79.5 million forcibly displaced people – putting refugees' health, livelihoods, and educations at risk. And while seeking asylum is a human right, it has been under attack as countries work to contain the virus. Although many hoped the pandemic would ease international tensions and lead to ceasefires, conflicts continued to rage, including in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan.

Refugees themselves have stepped up to address these challenges. Refugee-led Organizations – or RLOs - provided lifesaving services to their community in the face of the global pandemic, supported refugees in danger and provided direct funding to support the important work of their community.

While COVID-19 made improving the global response to the refugee crisis more urgent, it also demonstrated the importance of the localization agenda. With traditional humanitarian actors facing new travel restrictions and capacity limitations, RLOs filled the gap and provided life-saving assistance to both refugee and host communities. In South Africa, GRN members like Mary Tal provided essential services to refugees, including refugee children who lost parents, via her RLO Whole World Women Association. In Uganda, in the absence of specific government campaigns targeting refugee access to the COVID-19 vaccine, GRN members like RELON Uganda and European Coalition campaign Vaccine4all/ all4vaccine, challenging kept their community informed and protected, by vaccine misinformation, to translating crucial information about COVID-19 into refugees' native languages.

Refugee engagement in the Afghanistan response once again demonstrated in real-time how including refugees can lead to better-informed policies. When the Afghanistan news broke, the GRN responded quickly. GRN members like the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) used their personal experience and professional expertise to support Afghan refugees. APNOR was a first responder – coordinating legal aid, facilitating a hotline for psychological counselling, and supporting evacuation efforts for Afghans in danger. Having fled Afghanistan in the 90s, the refugee leaders had vital information from the ground about how the situation is progressing, as well as a unique understanding of the danger Afghans face under Taliban rule, and in the journey to seek asylum. The GRN also coordinated letters to the European Union and UNHCR to outline ways in which the international community should support Afghan refugees, including by increasing resettlement pathways.

In 2018, the world recognized that including refugees in designing and implementing the global refugee response would lead to better, more sustainable, policies. This idea was enshrined in the Global Compact on Refugees, which calls on “States and relevant stakeholders to facilitate meaningful participation of refugees... ensuring their inclusion of perspectives on progress.”

Refugees have been working to advance the meaningful refugee participation agenda.

In 2019, the GRN launched the Refugee Participation Pledge, the first pledge made towards the GRF. This Pledge calls for the “support the meaningful participation of refugees... in decisions that affect their lives” and has been signed by over 17 actors, including Canada, Denmark, Australia, and the Netherlands, and – the newly announced – USA, Save the Children and Care International. Drafted using the principles of the Grand Bargain’s “Participation Revolution,” the Age Gender, and Diversity Framework, and the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda to leave no one behind, the Pledge has led to the formation of an ad-hoc, multi-stakeholder coalition that works together to advance the meaningful refugee participation agenda. The Pledge has also catalysed innovative approaches to participation, like the inclusion of refugees on member state delegations. Yesterday, the US, Germany, and Canada all had refugees on their delegation. We applaud our fellow refugee-led organizations, like the GYAC, RSEAT, RRLI, NWC and countless others, who have partnered with us to make this transformational change happen.

The GRN also led the initiative to increase direct refugee engagement at the Annual Tripartite Resettlement Consultation on Refugees. Our advocacy resulted in the establishment of the first-ever Refugee Steering Group at ATRC, which will be among the primary actors to shape the forthcoming ATRC.

Meaningful refugee participation requires a capable, networked, and well-resourced refugee civil society. The GRN works to support refugee-led organizations around the world to ensure they can meaningfully engage in policy processes. We regularly convene refugees in regional and global contexts, map and connect RLOs, and coordinate refugee advocacy regionally, and globally. For example, we held a global refugee stocktaking event on 1 December 2021, that brought together over 100, (women young and elderly) refugees from around the world. Also, in 2021 we launched *Refugee Skill Up*, a series of train-the-trainer skills-building workshops by refugees, for refugees.

We, the GRN, recommend three, concrete ways that the international community can make the GCR’s call for meaningful refugee participation a reality:

First, we invite you to join the Refugee Participation Pledge and help us advocate to change the system to be more inclusive of affected communities. We are calling for the international community to commit to 25% refugee participation in the next Global Refugee Forum in 2023, reflecting an integration of age, gender and diversity. We are also calling for the establishment of refugee representation in UNHCR’s governing body, EXCOM, by 2023.

Second, we urge you to increase direct RLO access to flexible funding, particularly to help women, youth, LGBTQI and other often excluded refugee groups. RLOs, and networks of RLOs, are uniquely positioned to facilitate engagement between governments, NGOs, the private sector, and other stakeholders.

Third, we implore you to advocate to secure equal, quality health treatment for forcibly displaced people, including access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Access to health is an essential first step for refugees to be able to engage in the policy space.

We look forward to seeing what we can achieve together towards the next Global Refugee Forum.

Thank you.
GRN Steering Committee